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ABSTRACT

The El Paso study was directed toward the identification and analysis of cultural and social factors, their variation and magnitude among Spanish-speaking families and their school age children. The premise was that cultural and social variations do exist within as well as between social groupings. A stratified selection technique was employed to select schools for the study. A total of three distinct geographic areas were identified, and three schools from each were selected for the study. Student questionnaires and family interviews were used to obtain data. General conclusions were: (1) just over half of the mothers and fathers were born in the United States; (2) the population was stable; (3) families were large; and (4) education level was low. A major assumption was that an analysis of specific generations might reveal significant sub-group differences in cultural and social patterns. Students were therefore placed in one of four groups: (1) Mexican immigrant; (2) first generation Mexican-American; (3) second generation Mexican-American; and (4) American. Results showed that the greatest changes occur between immigrant children and third generation or more American families. Changes and trends toward acculturation were also evident in the three closely identified Mexican-American groups. (SJ)

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Paper (1) Cultural Stability And Change Among Mexican-American Families In An Urban Setting: A Comparison Of Generations In El Paso, Texas

The El Paso study was directed toward the identification and analysis of cultural and social factors, their variation and magnitude among Spanish-speaking families and their school-age children. The study was supported by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas and staffed and operated by the Research Center, New Mexico State University.

El Paso, a city of approximately 312,000, as a border community, has a Spanish-speaking group that represents slightly more than half the total population. Many of these families have resided in the community for generations, but there continues to occur considerable immigration from Juarez and inner regions of Mexico. El Paso provided a Spanish-speaking population which included immigrants and those who had resided in the United States for one or more generations. It was assumed these sub-groups possessed a variety of cultural and social characteristics.

One premise was that cultural and social variations do exist within as well as between social groupings. If within the Spanish-speaking or Mexican-American sub-group variations exist, then such knowledge is basic for those designing appropriate educational experiences.

While this paper is limited to analysis of the social and cultural attributes of the group as a whole and identifiable sub-groupings, the total project had four major objectives. They were: (1) to identify and measure those cultural and social factors that may contribute to success or failure in academic achievement; (2) to identify and measure school factors that may contribute to success or

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failure in academic achievement; (3) to evaluate and draw inferences as to the specific components of the home and school environment which may contribute to academic success or failure, and (4) to analyze the interrelationships between these.

Classroom factors and their relationship to achievement, another part of the study model, will be discussed in a subsequent paper by Doctor Robert Lange.

Prior to collecting data in El Paso, a pilot study was undertaken in Las Cruces, New Mexico to validate student questionnaire forms and family interview guides. Instruments were tested on a sample of 953 students and 163 families and some items revised and others eliminated. Three student questionnaires were developed, a questionnaire of thirty-seven (37) items for elementary students (grades 1-3) to be completed by teachers of the students, an instrument of sixty-three (63) items for students to complete in grades 6-8, a secondary form of one hundred and twenty (120) items for students in grades 9-12, and an interview guide of one hundred and twenty (120 items utilized to collect data from parents.

Results of the pilot study were published as a monograph for the 1968 National Conference of Educational Opportunities for Mexican-Americans held in Austin, Texas.

The most significant finding emerging from this pilot study was that students from Spanish-speaking backgrounds appeared to have less confidence in their ability to successfully fulfill the expectations of their parents and the school than did Anglo students, despite a lack of difference in their educational expectations. In other words, the key difference between groups was related to their individual self-concepts.

In the El Paso study, a stratified selection technique was employed to select schools for the study. Three rather distinct geographic areas were identified based on their socioeconomic status, level of acculturation and proportion of children of Spanish-speaking families attending school. Nine schools, three from

each area, were selected for the study (one high school, one junior high school and one elementary school - See Figures 1 and 2). A student sample of 3,300 was then selected representing classes in grades one, three, six, seven and nine through twelve. The three sample areas had the following distinctive characteristics:

> Area A was virtually 100 percent Spanish-speaking with a low income status and with many newly arrived Mexican immigrants.
>
> Area B consisted of rather stable second generation, 75 percent or more Spanish-speaking, and upper lower class economic status.
>
> Area C was about 50 percent Spanish-speaking, predominantly middle class and rapidly becoming a Spanish-speaking community.

Findings in this paper were limited to data collected from student questionnaires and family interview guides. They were based upon data collected from 680 primary, 1006 intermediate and junior high, and 1,381 secondary students. In addition, family data were based on interviews of 481 families randomly selected from the total number of families involved. Most of the conclusions presented specifically relate to results obtained from the secondary student questionnaire and family interviews; both closely reflect findings from the elementary and intermediate questionnaires.

A few general conclusions about the group were possible by a simple item analysis of the family interview instrument. Several socio-economic and cultural factors and attitudes were identified for the total sample. The 481 family interviews revealed that 39 percent of the mothers and 32 percent of the fathers in the interview sample were born in Mexico. Just slightly over half of all the mothers and fathers were born in the United States. However, a remarkable degree of population stability was evidenced in that over half the families interviewed had lived in the United States over five years, while 39 percent of the group had lived in El Paso all their lives.

For the most part, the families were large, averaging four or five children in the family. Twenty-five percent of the families had seven or more children.

The educational level was discovered as being quite low. Half the mothers and 40 percent of the fathers had less than eight years of education; only 16 percent of the mothers and 22 percent of the fathers had graduated from high school.

In addition, a five point occupational scale was employed to provide another measure of economic status. Twenty-nine percent of the fathers were in the lowest category and 32 percent in the next lowest. Only 8 percent of the fathers were in the two top categories, identified with professional and managerially related occupations.

Relatively few of the mothers, 25 percent, were employed full time outside the home. Another 10 percent worked part time. Of the working mothers, two-thirds were employed as domestic servants, waitresses or as common laborers. Most mothers remained in the home despite the low economic status of the family.

In a question related to feelings about their future, about half the fathers and mothers indicated they felt they should plan ahead. One-third were rather pessimistic about the need for future time orientation and the remainder undecided, evidencing a great diversity in orientation towards the future.

Spanish remains the native tongue in a great majority of these families. Sixty-six percent reported that it was the language used the majority of the time between husband and wife. Sixty-one percent responded in the same manner with respect to conversing with their children. Children, in a majority of these families, it appears, encounter English primarily outside the home.

It was assumed that the parents' attitudes towards education were reflected in the educational aspirations for their children. Only 16 percent of the mothers had completed high school themselves, but 81 percent strongly desired that their children complete high school. College aspirations for their children were held by 60 percent of the mothers, but mothers felt this decision was

largely up to their children. Responses of the mothers towards education highly corresponded with those of the fathers. Over two-thirds of the mothers reported that they seldom or never assisted their children with their school work. The same pattern held true for fathers.

Additional conclusions were drawn from the responses of 1,381 secondary student A review of the data revealed that the findings were similar to those reported by primary and intermediate students and therefore it is assumed adequately describes the entire sample of approximately 3,000 students. In addition this questionnaire contained more questions and thus provided a more detailed description into attitudes towards life and education.

A major assumption in the project was that an analysis of specific generations might reveal significant sub-group differences in cultural and social patterns. That is, those families and parents who had recently migrated to the United States would be less acculturated than those of the same or different heritage whose ancestors had been in the United States for a number of generations. For the purpose of this study students were placed into one of four groupings:

I. If the child indicated that he was born in Mexico then he was classified as a Mexican immigrant. N = 281

II. If the child indicated that he was born in the United States but that either his father or mother were born in Mexico then he was classified as first generation Mexican-American. N = 373

III. If the child indicated that he and both of his parents were born in the U.S. but that any one of the four grandparents were born in Mexico, then he was classified as second generation Mexican-American. N = 269

IV. If the child indicated that he, his parents, and all his grandparents were born in the United States then he was classified as third generation (or more) American. N = 212

Of the 1,381 students administered the student questionnaire, 1,135 could be classified into one of these groups by the information gathered from the questionnaire. The first three classifications included those with identifiable Mexican

heritage. Those in group four included some of this heritage but most were classifiable as Anglos by surname.

This analysis revealed a number of change patterns (See Figure 3). Several socio-economic factors illuminated trends across groups. For example, a question dealing with number of siblings in the family revealed that 24 percent of the immigrant group were in families having three or less children. This increased to 30 percent for second generation Mexican-Americans and to 48 percent to the third generation American group.

The fathers' and mothers' education level revealed the same trend. Forty-one percent of the fathers in group one had less than eight years of schooling and this percentage decreased to 10 percent for group four (See Figure 4).

Also the father's occupation showed the same downward trend. Sixty-four percent of those in group one were in the two lowest order job categories and this decreased to 37 percent for category four. Jobs in these two categories included, among others, janitor, farm laborer, mechanic, welder and truck driver. Mothers, it was discovered, were more likely to be housewives in group one. Two-thirds so reporte and this decreased to one-half for group four (See Figure 5). In this instance it should be noted that in the three clearly identified Mexican-American categories percentages remained stable at the two-thirds level.

The same trends were evident with respect to having a phone in the home, possessing a car or truck or having a daily newspaper in the home. The most striking factor was the newspaper, rising from 48 percent in group one to 92 percent in group four. With each factor, the percentage increased from a low for group one to a high for group four.

Several socio-economic factors showed stability over groups. Almost all, regardless of classification, 98 percent, had a T.V. in the home. Most, 80 percent, lived in homes solely with parents (without other relatives or friends) and

70 percent across categories were living at that time with both their natural parents.

In the area of language, 92 percent of the parents spoke Spanish to each other in group one "most" or "all t he time" and this declined to 46 percent for group three and 14 percent for group four (See Figure 6). Children's language patterns with each other showed the same trend but with only 36 percent using Spanish "most" or "all the time" in group one and this declining to 9 percent in group four.

Questions related to school, solicited views from the students about their own attitudes and those of their parents. Mothers were reported to assist with school work "seldom" or "never" by two-thirds of those in group I and this percentage decreased to one-half for group four. With fathers, however, an average across categories of 60 percent responded in the "seldom" or "never" categories.

Parents' desires for their children to complete high school or college fluctuated little, as more than 80 percent of the fathers in each group desired their children to complete high school and 75 percent expressed a desire that they complete college. Slightly more mothers had higher education desires for their children, but again the responses were stable across groupings.

About 40 percent of boys in category one had college or trade school aspirations themselves and again a rising trend was revealed as 63 percent so responded in group four. In the same respect, 40 percent of the girls responded in this manner in group one and 65 percent in group four.

When asked if they felt they had the ability to complete college, 12 percent in group one responded yes and this rose to 25 percent in group four. Here the percentage was stable in the Mexican-American categories. The answer to this question placed along side the results in the two preceding questions reveals a paradox.

Those indicating aspirations for college, both students and parents for their children, far exceed the percentage who appraise themselves as having the ability to complete college.

Students were also asked whether they felt what they were studying was valuable in everyday life. Here the trend was one where more in category one responded yes, 66 percent to 49 percent responding yes in category four.

When asked if they would stay in school if offered a job paying $75 a week, there was an upward trend in those who responded either "probably" or "definitely" from 55 to 71 percent (See Figure 7). Questions which revealed stability included the response by 70 percent that getting good grades was very important. Sixty-five percent reported, "yes, definitely", that they had the ability to complete high school but approximately 40 percent reported that sometimes they had the feeling they just couldn't learn (See Figure 8). Also, 50 percent felt it very important to please the teacher and 80 to 91 percent replied, "agree" to "strongly agree" with the statement that the school's major job was preparing them to get good jobs (See Figure 9).

Other questions about school included one assessing their involvement in school social activities. With athletics participation, 17, 16, 18 percent respectively responded they were "very active" in the three Mexican-American groups while the figure rose to 28 percent who responded "very active" in group four. A question about school clubs showed that 13 percent replied "very active" in group one and there was a steady rise to 28 percent in group four.

Reported student relationships with teachers were somewhat different between groups. When asked how often teachers compliment you about things in school, 37 percent in group one reported "once or twice a year" or "never" and this rose to 41 percent for group two, was 40 percent for group three and declined to 30 percent

for group four. All percentages appeared low but no trend was apparent. When asked whether students could readily talk to teachers 48 percent replied, "almost all" students can in group one but this decreased to 35 percent for group four. Here those in group four felt that fewer students in their estimation can talk to teachers than in the immigrant group.

One question about peer attitudes towards education revealed that students reported the percentage of their friends with college aspirations increased across groups. Thirty-two percent in group one answered "much" or "very much" to the question and in group four this climbed to 64 percent.

Stability of response was found when a question was addressed to their friends' desires to complete high school. Seventy-two percent responded "much" or "very much" across all groups. The same stability was evident when 65 percent of all groups responded "much" or "very much" that their friends felt they ought to get good grades.

Other attitudes were measured in areas of self-concept, achievement motivation, central importance of family, present or future time orientation, importance of material gains, planning for the future and social mores related to religion, language and ethnic group.

Of the above, those responses that indicate differences across groups include the following. One question stated, "When in trouble only a relative can be trusted." Less than a third across groups responded with "agree" to "strongly agree." This percentage declined from 27 percent for group one to 11 percent for group four. A similar result was forthcoming with the question, "Planning makes a person unhappy, plans hardly ever work", as again 26 percent or less responded "agree" to "strongly agree" but this figure dropped lower for group four where 15 percent responded in these categories.

Students were asked how about the number of students they got along with outside their own friendship group. About one-third of the immigrants responded with "half" or "less than half" of all other students. This figure dropped to 14 percent for group four (See Figure 10).

Forty-four percent in group one responded "yes" they would be pleased to have a relative with a different religion (See Figure 11). This rose gradually to 68 percent in group four. A similar question, but with friend substituted for relative, saw the percentages rise across groups from 68 percent in group one to 84 percent in group four.

Responses to several questions showed apparent stability across groups. One question stated, "The job comes first even if it takes time from more enjoyable things." To this question 82 percent across groups responded "agree" to "strongly agree." With respect to the concept of fatalism, the question was, "When a man is born his destiny is already determined." Here the responses showed 21-25 percent responding "agree" or "strongly agree" across groups (See Figure 12). Again in a comparison question dealing with the importance of planning in life, 75-80 percent marked "agree" or "strongly agree" indicating a similar stand.

In another question dealing with attitude toward the extended family, students were asked, "When finding a job a person ought to find a position near his parents, even if it means losing a good job elsewhere." The percentage that responded "agree" to "strongly agree" ranged from 7-10 percent, an extremely low figure and stable across groups. A question with respect to the importance of pleasing parents saw 75 percent across groups responding it was "important" to "very important." In a somewhat related question as to the importance of the family, 50 percent marked "a parent" when asked who they talk to when they have a serious question, far exceeding the number who mentioned friends, other adults and school personnel. In fact, less than three percent indicated their choice as being a teacher or school counselor.

In the area of social mores, a majority across groups responded they would be pleased to have friends or relatives with a first language different from theirs.

The above data describes both generally and by means of sub-groups a significant number of school age children and their families in an urban center where approximately 80 percent of the sample represents a minority group classified as Mexican-American.

In summary, the general description of the population revealed families with low economic status, fathers with little formal education and where Spanish remained their preferred language. Children came from large families where mothers generally remained in the home as housewives. Fathers and mothers as a whole held high educational aspirations for their children.

When we look closer at sub-group patterns as seen through the eyes of those students in secondary schools, a number of trends are evident from generation to generation. The greatest changes occur between immigrant children and third generation or more American families. But changes and trends towards acculturation were evident in the three closely identified Mexican-American groups.

Socio-economic factors that produced trends across groups includes status of occupation, level of educational attainment and having a daily newspaper in the home. In each instance the trend was from low to high from group one to group four.

The same trends were evident with language usage as time moved the majority into utilization of English.

Aspirations for college increased from group one to four as did the student's perception of his ability to complete college.

Assessment in the area of social mores and customs revealed several interesting trends. More in the immigrant group agreed that relatives are the only ones you trust when in trouble and the same trend was evident when more immigrants professed to get along with fewer outside their friendship group than in the other

three generation groups. Also acceptance of a relative or friend with a different religion increased from group one to four.

Many factors showed stability and those of particular significance included a desire of parents for their children's education (high percentage); amount of parental assistance given to children with school work (low percentage); level of achievement motivation (high); importance of planning (high); present time orientation (low); importance of maintaining close knit extended family (low); and acceptance of a relative or friend with a different first language (high).

One does not need to look at length to find general descriptions of Mexican-Americans or Spanish-speaking Americans. Stereotypes are abundant in the literature but may not be appropriate for many, particularly those now residing in large urban centers of the United States. They may only serve to place upon human beings inappropriate tags and to provide tunnel vision for educational researchers and those responsible for providing public education for young people.

An ultra-macrocosmic view may lull many researchers and practitioners into fitting groups into neat little boxes. Commonly heard descriptions for Mexican-Americans include, among others, that they are present-time oriented, place limited stress on material gains and lightly value formal education, to name a few. These characteristics appear questionable for those in this study.

Low economic status and having a first language other than English appear to be altered by length of residence. The former, however, remains extremely low despite a distinct change from generation to generation. It may well be that the school's response to each helps produce a third factor, the development of a negative or inferior self concept, and ultimate failure in education.

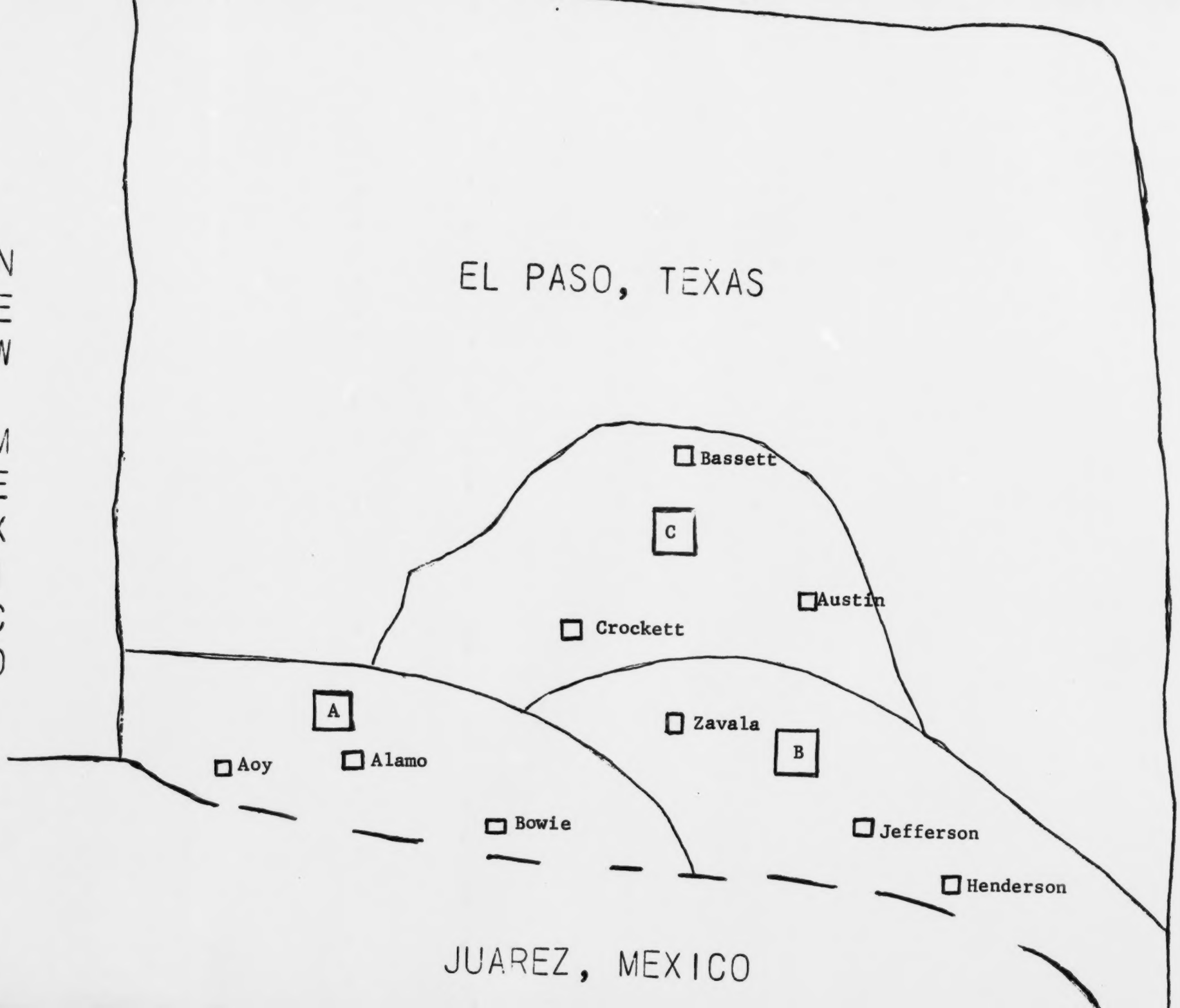
NEW MEXICO
EL PASO, TEXAS
Bassett
C
Austin
Crockett
A
Zavala
B
Aoy
Alamo
Bowie
Jefferson
Henderson
JUAREZ, MEXICO

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

CHARACTERISTICS OF GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS

A. Alamo-Bowie-Aoy Area
   1. It is low-income economically _____ (i.e. low-low class).
   2. It consists of new immigrants from Mexico (i.e. first generation).
   3. It is virtually 100 percent Mexican-American.
   4. The area itself is not changing substantially in its make-up.

B. Zavala-Henderson-Jefferson Area
   1. It is a higher income area (i.e. high-low class).
   2. It consists of second generation Mexican-Americans.
   3. It is largely Mexican-American with some Negroes.
   4. Again the area is not changing substantially.

C. Crockett-Bassett-Austin Area
   1. This area is definitely middle class.
   2. The Mexican-American families in this area have been in El Paso for three generations or more.
   3. It is about 50 percent Mexican-Americar
   4. It is rapidly becoming predominantly Mexican-American.

FIGURE 3

FAMILIES WITH THREE OR LESS CHILDREN

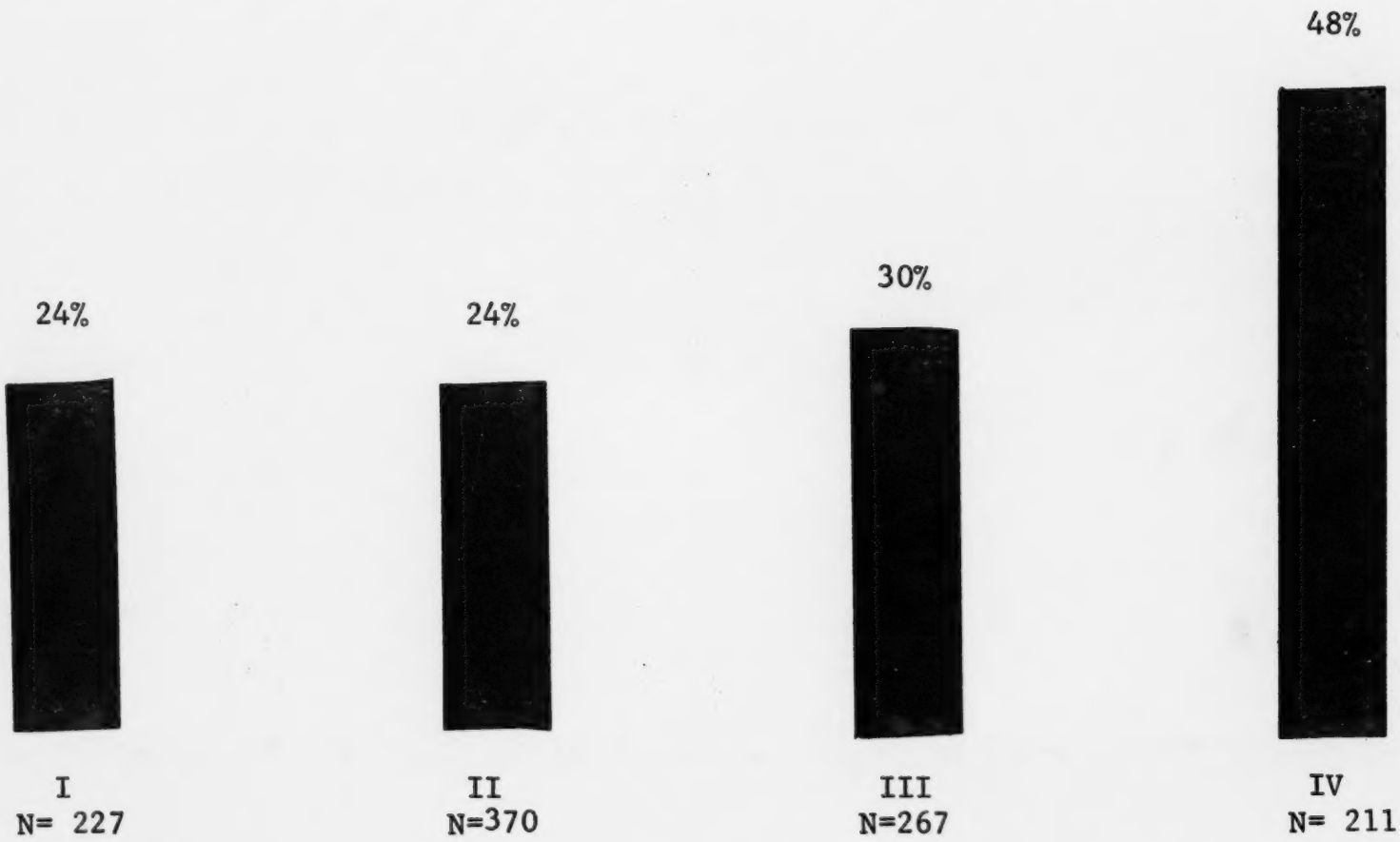

FIGURE 4

FATHERS WITH EIGHT YEARS OR LESS OF FORMAL EDUCATION

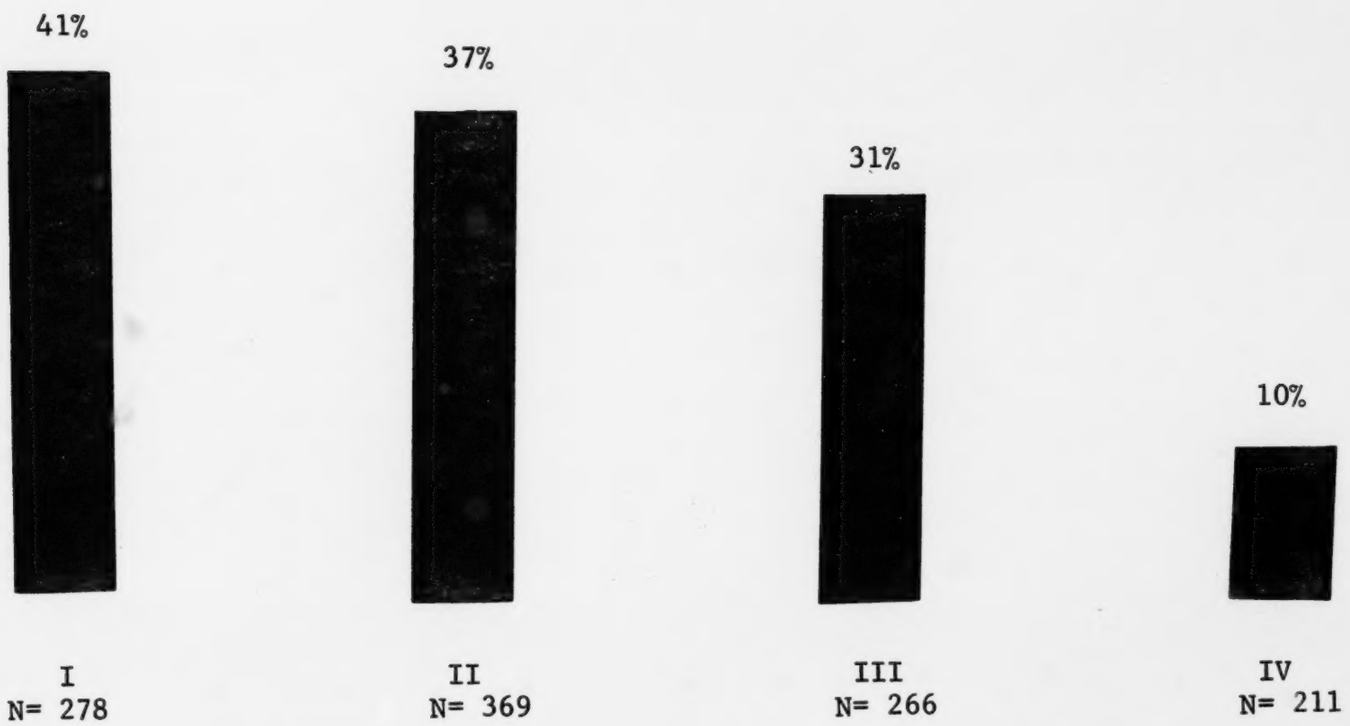

FIGURE 5

FATHERS WITH OCCUPATIONS IN
TWO LOWEST CATEGORIES

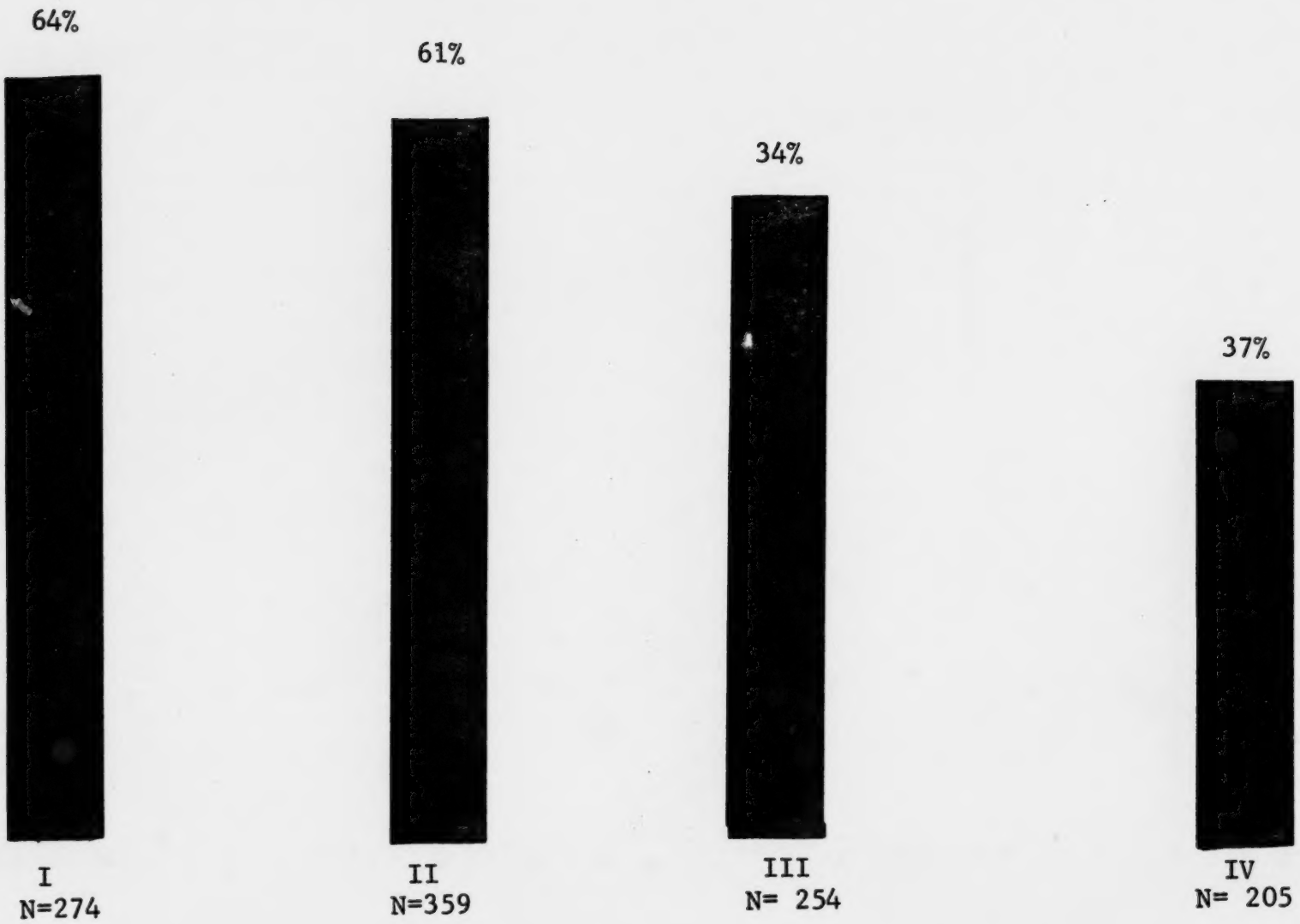

FIGURE 6

PARENTS SPEAK SPANISH MOST OF THE TIME BETWEEN EACH OTHER

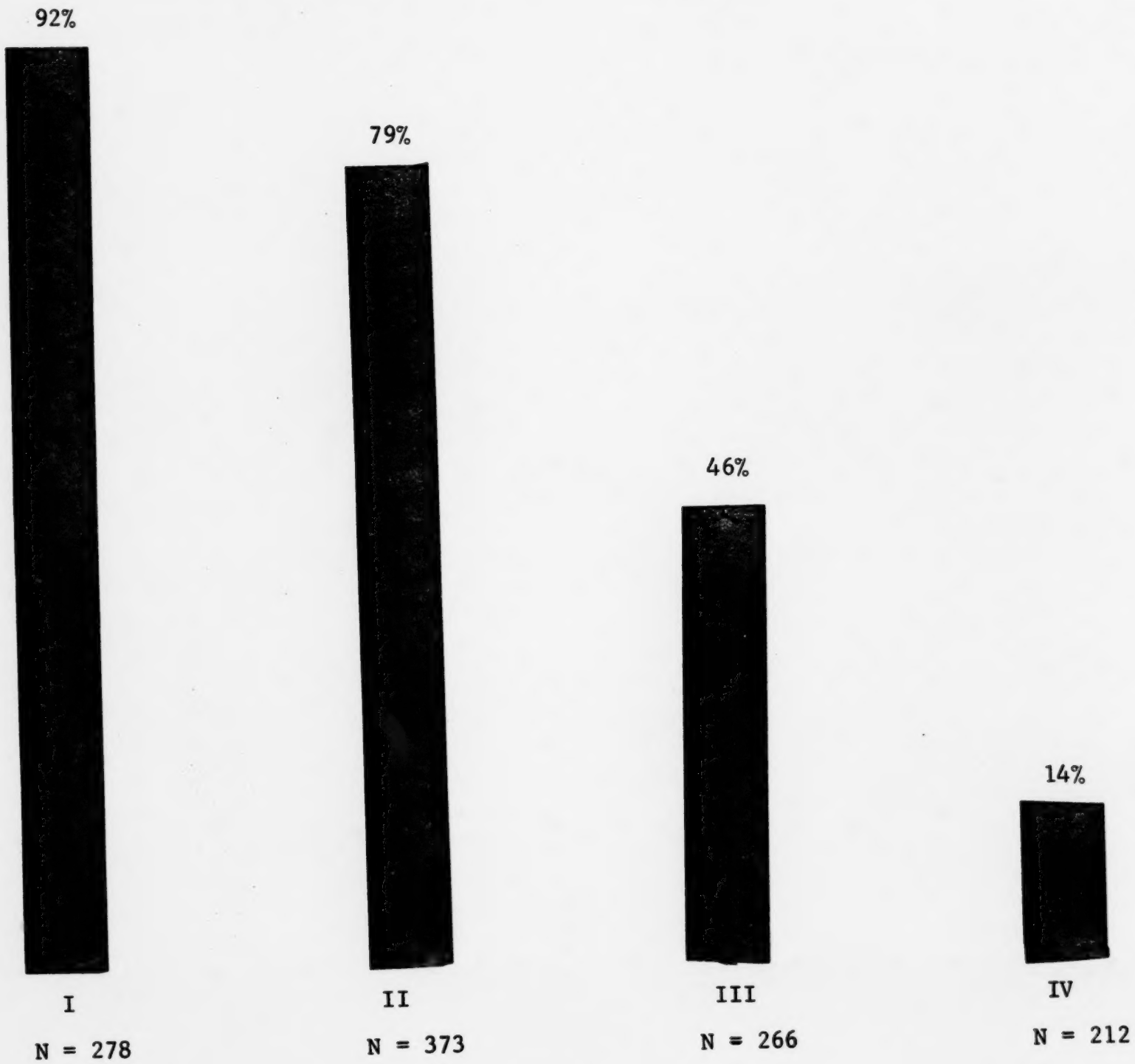

FIGURE 7

YES I DEFINITELY WOULD STAY IN SCHOOL, EVEN IF OFFERED A JOB PAYING $75.00 A WEEK

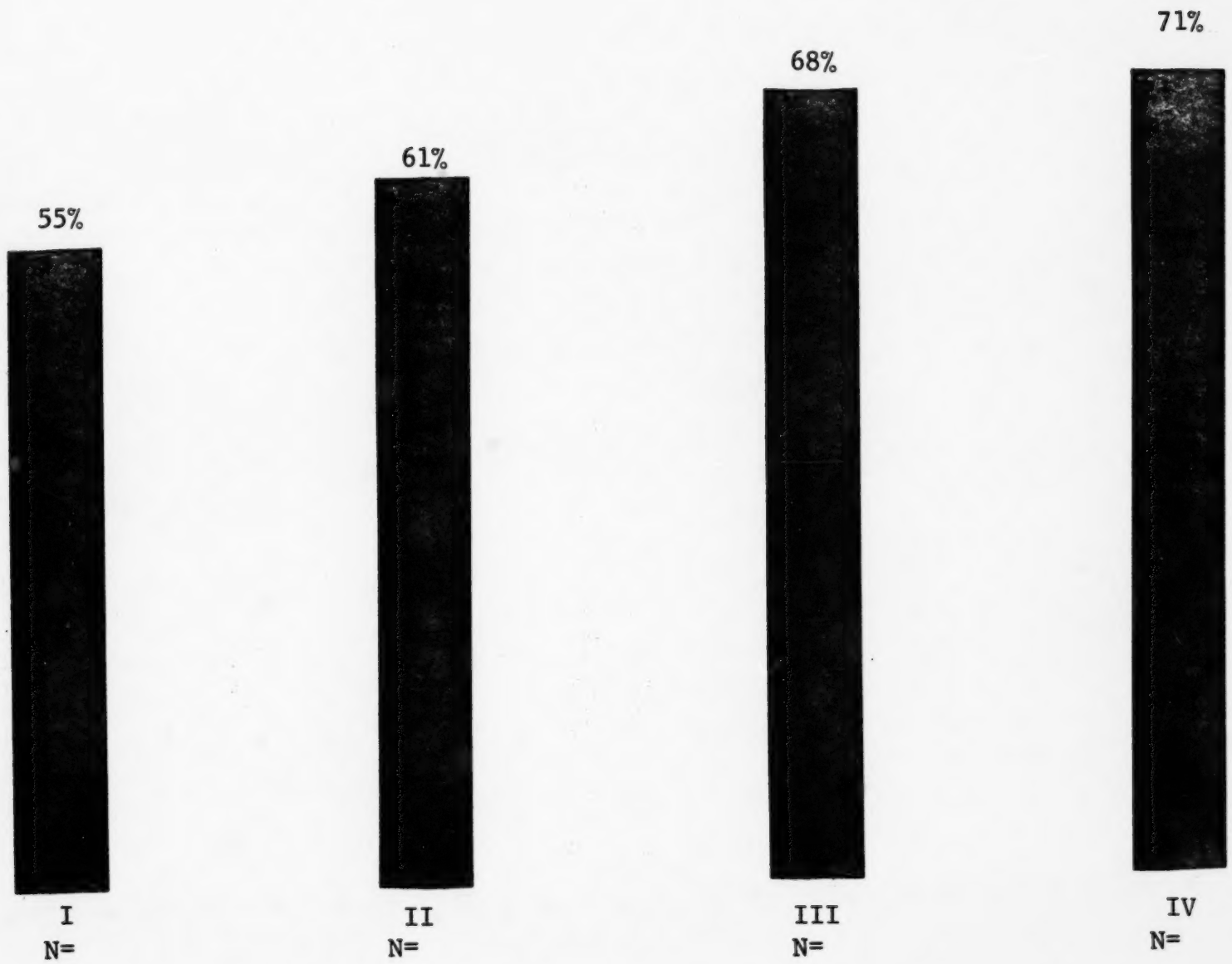

FIGURE 8

SOMETIMES I HAVE THE FEELING I CANNOT LEARN.

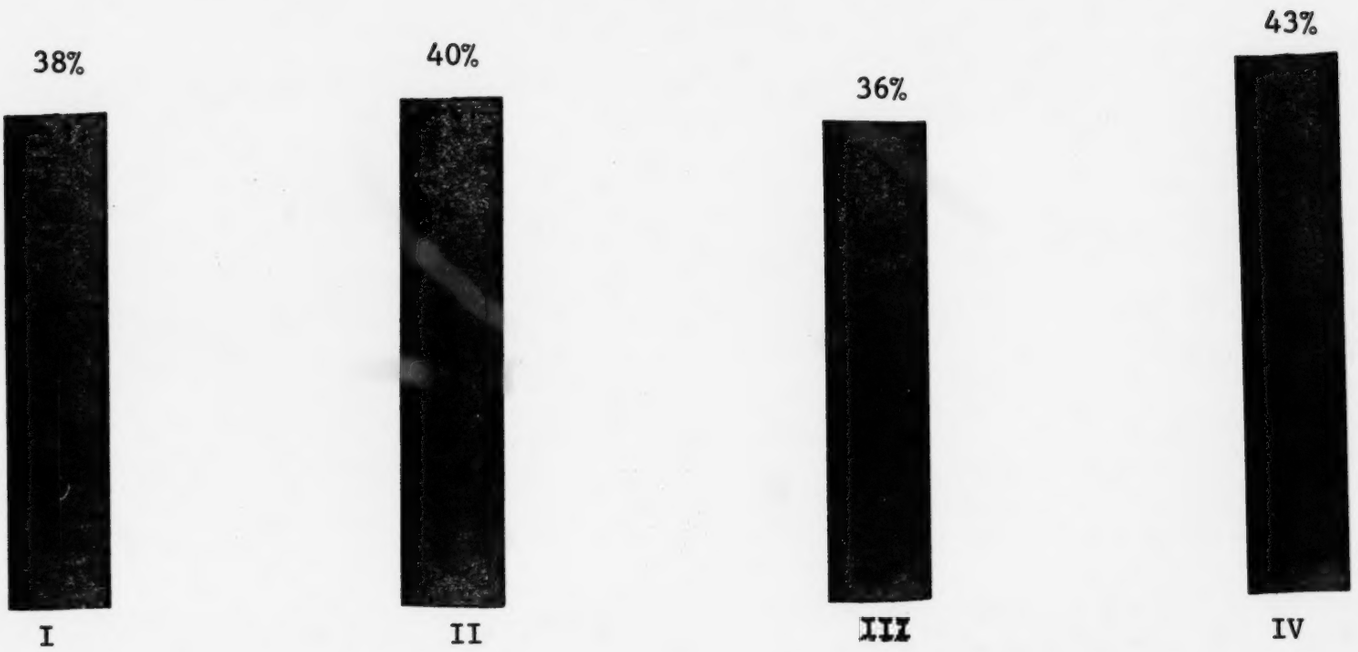

FIGURE 9

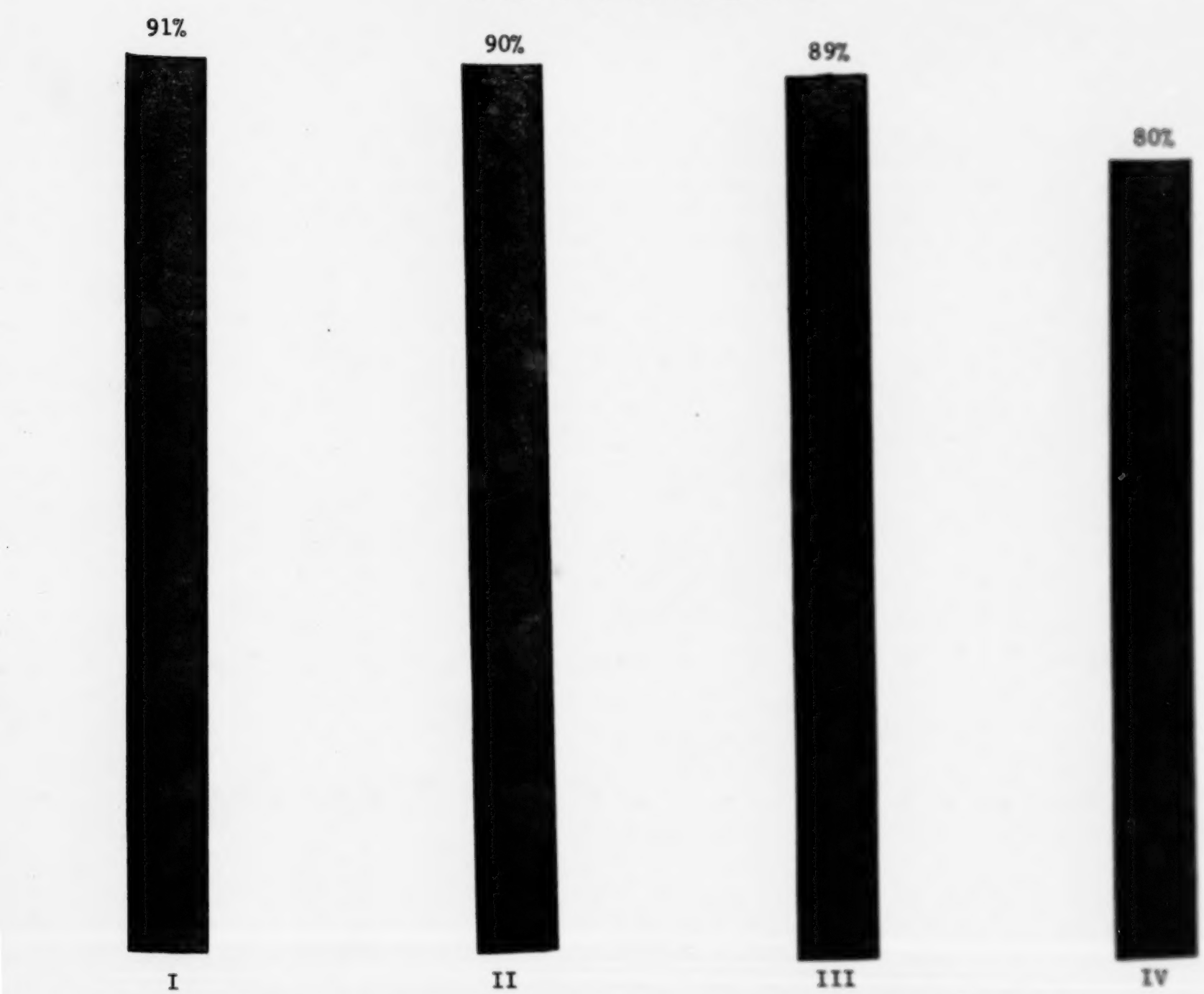
THE SCHOOL IS FOR THE PURPOSE OF PREPARING YOU TO GET A GOOD JOB.
"AGREE" AND "STRONGLY AGREE"
91%
90%
89%
80%
I
II
III
IV

FIGURE 10

I GET ALONG WITH HALF OR LESS OF THE OTHER STUDENTS OUTSIDE MY OWN FRIENDS.

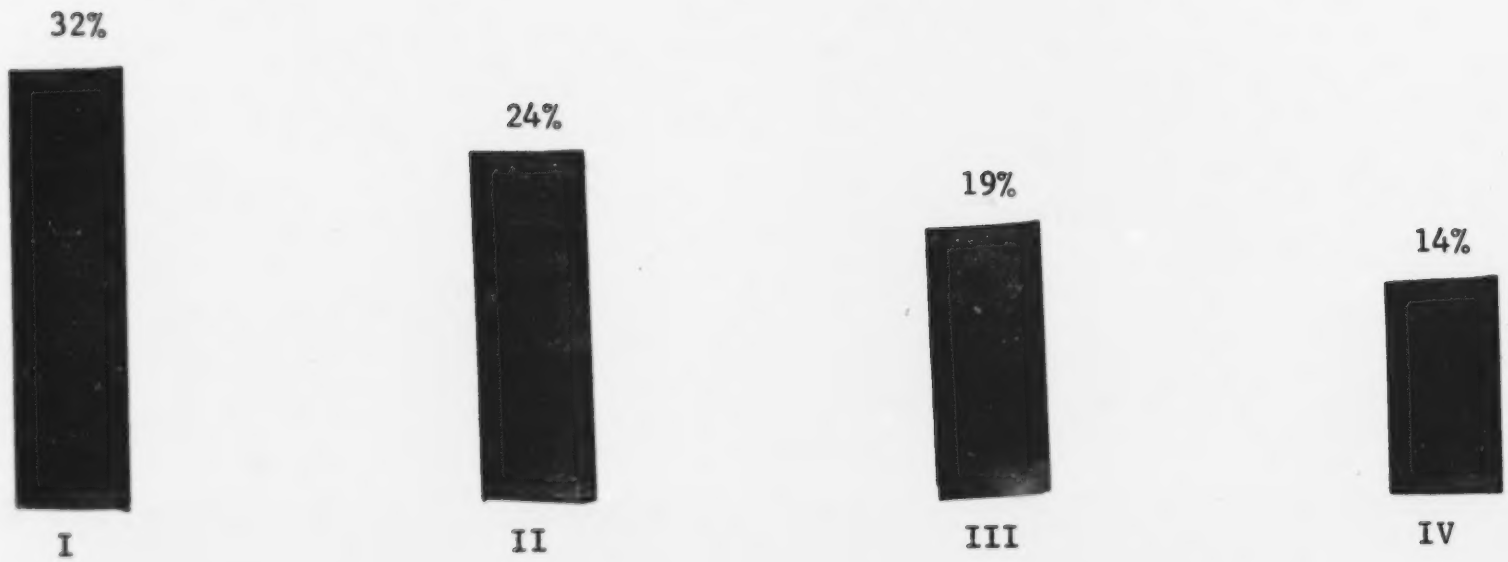

FIGURE 11

I WOULD BE PLEASED TO HAVE A RELATIVE WITH A DIFFERENT RELIGION THAN MINE.

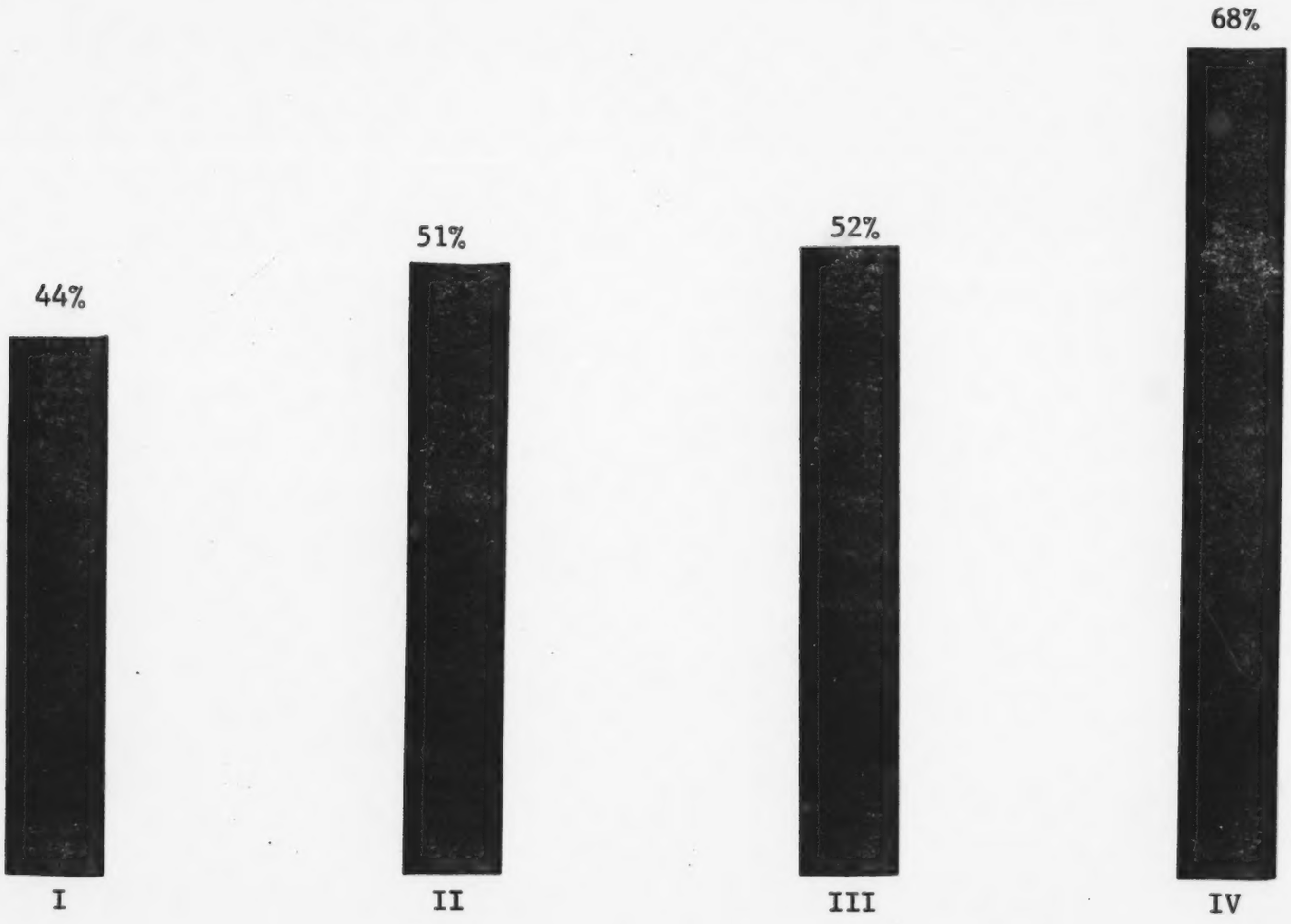

FIGURE 12

WHEN A MAN IS BORN HIS DESTINY IS ALREADY DETERMINED. (AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE)